

Tab 1	SB 76 by Hooper (CO-INTRODUCERS) Burgess, Book; (Identical to H 00109) State Park Campsite Reservations
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Tab 2	SB 54 by Rodriguez; (Identical to H 00135) Land Acquisition Trust Fund
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The Florida Senate
COMMITTEE MEETING EXPANDED AGENDA

ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Senator Rodriguez, Chair

Senator Harrell, Vice Chair

MEETING DATE: Tuesday, January 17, 2023

TIME: 1:30—3:00 p.m.

PLACE: 301 Senate Building

MEMBERS: Senator Rodriguez, Chair; Senator Harrell, Vice Chair; Senators Albritton, Martin, Mayfield, Polsky, Powell, Stewart, and Wright

TAB	BILL NO. and INTRODUCER	BILL DESCRIPTION and SENATE COMMITTEE ACTIONS	COMMITTEE ACTION
1	SB 76 Hooper (Identical H 109)	State Park Campsite Reservations; Requiring the Division of Recreation and Parks of the Department of Environmental Protection to allow residents and nonresidents to make state park campsite reservations within specified timeframes; requiring Florida residents to provide information from their Florida driver license or identification card for certain reservations made in advance, etc. EN 01/17/2023 Favorable AEG FP	Favorable Yeas 9 Nays 0
2	SB 54 Rodriguez (Identical H 135)	Land Acquisition Trust Fund; Requiring an annual appropriation from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to the Department of Environmental Protection to implement the Florida Keys Stewardship Act or to acquire land within the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern for specified purposes; prohibiting the department from using the appropriated funds to implement wastewater management projects or programs, etc. EN 01/17/2023 Fav/CS AEG AP	Fav/CS Yeas 9 Nays 0
3	Presentation by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection on Seagrass Restoration		Presented
4	Presentation by the Florida Wildlife Corridor Foundation on the Florida Wildlife Corridor		Presented

Other Related Meeting Documents

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

BILL: SB 76

INTRODUCER: Senator Hooper and others

SUBJECT: State Park Campsite Reservations

DATE: January 13, 2023

REVISED: _____

ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1. Barriero	Rogers	EN	Favorable
2. _____	_____	AEG	_____
3. _____	_____	FP	_____

I. Summary:

SB 76 allows Florida residents to reserve state park campsites one month before nonresidents. Specifically, the bill requires the Division of Recreation and Parks of the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to allow Florida residents to reserve state park campsites, including RV sites, up to 12 months in advance, and up to 11 months in advance for nonresidents. Florida residents must provide proof of residency (a Florida driver license or identification card) on the reservation website and upon check-in for reservations made more than 11 months in advance.

II. Present Situation:

Florida State Parks

Florida residents and visitors from around the world are drawn to the state's 175 award-winning¹ parks, spanning nearly 800,000 acres and 100 miles of coastline.² During fiscal year 2021-2022, over 32 million people visited our state parks.³ While approximately 75 percent of those visitors were "non-local," meaning they traveled from more than 50 miles away,⁴ Florida residents have, on average, made up 61 percent of all overnight visitors.⁵

¹ Florida is the first state to win four National Gold Medals (in 1999, 2005, 2013, and 2019) for the best state park system. See, DEP, *Florida State Parks: 2019 National Gold Medal Winner*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/learn/2019-national-gold-medal-winner#:~:text=On%20Tuesday%2C%20September%2024%2C%20the%20National%20Recreation%20and,the%20nation%20to%20win%20a%20fourth%20Gold%20Medal> (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

² DEP, *Division of Recreation and Parks*, <https://floridadep.gov/parks> (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

³ DEP, *2021-2022 Economic Impact Assessment Report for the Florida State Park System*, available at <https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/2022%20Economic%20Impact%20Assessment%20Report%20FINAL%209.26.22.pdf>.

⁴ See *id.* at 3. This percentage is from the 2006 Florida State Park Visitor Study. *Id.* See also DEP, *2016-2017 Economic Impact Assessment for the Florida Park System* at 4, available at <https://floridadep.gov/sites/default/files/Economic%20Impact%20Assessment%202016-2017.pdf>.

⁵ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Plan Your Visit: Frequently Asked Questions* (no. 24), <https://www.floridastateparks.org/plan-your-visit/faqs> (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

Florida state parks offer a variety of camping options:

- Fifty-six state parks offer campgrounds, 52 of which have amenities specifically for RV campers.⁶ Full-facility campsites for tent and RV campers include water, electricity, a grill and picnic table, as well as centralized showers, restrooms, and dump stations.⁷
- Twenty-eight state parks provide primitive campgrounds. These sites have limited improvements, such as a fire ring and a cleared area for tent camping, but generally have no electric power, and may or may not have potable water or bathroom facilities and are typically accessible by foot, bicycle, or canoe/kayak only.⁸
- Nineteen state parks offer cabins,⁹ with options varying from fully equipped modern cabins with kitchens, fireplaces, and screened porches to more primitive hand-hewn, lumber, or palm-log cabins.¹⁰
- Eighteen state parks offer camping for equestrians and their horses.¹¹ Amenities vary by park and range from ride-in primitive sites to areas suitable for rigs.¹² Some equestrian campsites include paddocks or stable facilities and restrooms with showers.¹³
- Seven state parks offer glamping (glamorous camping), which includes a canvas tent, a queen bed with linens, a seating area, device charging stations, and a cooling and heating unit.¹⁴ Glamping reservations are booked through third-party vendors.
- Six state parks provide boat slips with water and electricity. Boaters have access to park restrooms, showers, pump-outs, and other amenities. Boaters can also anchor overnight at Bill Baggs Cape Florida State Park and John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park.¹⁵

⁶ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Find A Park*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/parks-and-trails?parks%5B0%5D=experiences%3A242> (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

⁷ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Stay the Night*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/index.php/stay-night> (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

⁸ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Primitive Camping*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/primitive-camping> (last visited Jan. 9, 2023).

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ DEP, *Florida State Parks Camping and Cabins Guide*, at 4, available at https://www.floridastateparks.org/sites/default/files/media/file/2021_CampingCabinsGuide_Reservation%20Prices%20Update.pdf (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

¹¹ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Equestrian Camping*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/equestrian-camping> (last visited Jan. 9, 2023).

¹² A camping rig is defined as combinations of vehicles, trailers, tents, and/or hammocks. DEP, *Florida State Parks: Reservation Information*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/reservation-information> (last visited Jan. 10, 2023).

¹³ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Equestrian Camping*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/equestrian-camping> (last visited Jan. 9, 2023).

¹⁴ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Let's Go Glamping*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/index.php/learn/lets-go-glamping> (last visited Jan. 9, 2023).

¹⁵ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Boat Camping*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/boat-camping> (last visited Jan. 9, 2023).

Camping Reservations

Florida state parks¹⁶ allow visitors to make reservations up to 11 months in advance, either by phone or online.¹⁷ This booking window applies to both Florida residents and nonresidents. New dates become available daily at 8:00 a.m.¹⁸ Any new sites that become available throughout the day due to a cancellation are randomly released back into inventory following the cancellation.¹⁹

The maximum length of stay for a single reservation is 14 nights total. After 14 nights, visitors must leave the park for at least three nights before returning for a new stay. Based on availability and once the camper is registered and on-site, the park manager or designee may at their discretion extend a camper's current stay up to an additional 14 nights. Maximum continuous length of stay in any one park is 28 nights. Campers are permitted up to 56 nights of total occupancy in any one park in each six-month period, defined as October 1 - March 31, and April 1 - September 30. All campsites or cabins not reserved or occupied may be rented to walk-in visitors on a first-come, first-served basis.²⁰

Campsite fees and rental rates vary by park and are generally the same for residents and nonresidents.²¹ Only certain Florida citizens—those who are 65 years of age or older, disabled, or who operate a licensed family foster home—are eligible for a discount (50 percent).²² Recipients of such discounts must provide proof of eligibility.²³

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 amends s. 258.014, F.S. to require DEP's Division of Recreation and Parks to allow individuals to use the division's website to reserve state park campsites, including RV sites, as follows:

- For Florida residents, reservations up to 12 months in advance; and
- For nonresidents, reservations up to 11 months in advance.

A Florida resident who wishes to book a campsite more than 11 months in advance must provide proof of residency, (a valid Florida driver license or identification card issued under s. 322.051, F.S.) on the reservation website and upon check-in. The bill also makes technical changes.

¹⁶ Notably, some *county* parks allow advance reservations for residents. For example, Brevard County, Palm Beach County, and Fort De Soto Park in Pinellas County allow in-county residents to make reservations before nonresidents. *See* Brevard County Parks, *Parks & Recreation Online Portal Search*, <https://registration.brevardfl.gov/wbwc/webtrac.wsc/search.html?module=RN&primarycode=LONGP> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023); Palm Beach County, *Parks & Recreation: Campground Reservations*, <https://discover.pbccgov.org/parks/CampingJohnPrincePark/CamperInformation.aspx> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023); Pinellas County Parks, *Campsite & Picnic Shelter Reservation System*, <https://secure.rec1.com/FL/pinellas-county-fl/catalog> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023).

¹⁷ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Reservation Information*, <https://www.floridastateparks.org/reservation-information> (last visited Jan. 3, 2023).

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ *Id.*

²⁰ *Id.*

²¹ DEP, *Florida State Parks: Fee Schedule*, available at https://www.floridastateparks.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/2021_05_10%20FSP%20Fee%20Schedule%2005.2022.pdf (last visited Jan. 10, 2023).

²² *Id.* *See also* section 258.016, F.S.

²³ *Id.*

Section 2 provides an effective date of July 1, 2023.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

None.

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:

A. Tax/Fee Issues:

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

None.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

SB 76 applies to “reservations for state park campsites, including RV sites.” However, it may be unclear whether this includes reservations for all campground amenities, such as cabins, glamping sites, and boat camping/slips.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 258.014 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:

A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Changes:

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

None.

B. Amendments:

None.

This Senate Bill Analysis does not reflect the intent or official position of the bill's introducer or the Florida Senate.

By Senator Hooper

21-00322-23

202376__

A bill to be entitled
An act relating to state park campsite reservations;
amending s. 258.014, F.S.; requiring the Division of
Recreation and Parks of the Department of
Environmental Protection to allow residents and
nonresidents to make state park campsite reservations
within specified timeframes; requiring Florida
residents to provide information from their Florida
driver license or identification card for certain
reservations made in advance; providing an effective
date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Section 258.014, Florida Statutes, is amended to
read:

258.014 ~~Fees for~~ Use of state parks; fees for use; campsite
reservations.—

(1) FEES FOR USE.—

(a) The Division of Recreation and Parks shall have the
power to charge reasonable fees, rentals, or charges for the use
or operation of facilities and concessions in state parks. ~~and~~
All such fees, rentals, and charges so collected must ~~shall~~ be
deposited in the State Treasury to the credit of "State Park
Trust Fund," which is hereby created, the continuing balance of
which fund is hereby appropriated to be expended by said
division for the administration, improvement and maintenance of
state parks and for the acquisition and development of lands
hereafter acquired for state park purposes. The appropriation of

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said fund shall be continuing, and ~~may shall~~ not revert to the General Revenue Fund at the end of any fiscal year or at any other time but shall, until expended, be continually available to ~~the said~~ division for the uses and purposes set forth.

(b) ~~(2)~~ Any moneys received in trust by the division by gift, devise, appropriation, or otherwise shall, subject to the terms of such trust, be deposited with the Chief Financial Officer in a fund to be known as the "State Park Trust Fund," and shall be subject to withdrawal upon application of such division for expenditure or investment in accordance with the terms of the trust. Unless prohibited by the terms of the trust by which the moneys are derived, all ~~of~~ such moneys may be invested as provided by law.

(2) RESERVATIONS.—

(a) The Division of Recreation and Parks shall allow individuals to use the division's state parks reservation website to make reservations for state park campsites, including RV sites, as follows:

1. For Florida residents, reservations up to 12 months in advance; and

2. For nonresidents, reservations up to 11 months in advance.

(b) A Florida resident who wishes to book a state park campsite more than 11 months in advance must provide his or her valid Florida driver license number or the identification number from a Florida identification card issued under s. 322.051 as proof of Florida residency on the division's state parks reservation website and must present the license or identification card to a park representative upon check-in at

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59 the campsite.

60 Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

1-17-23

Meeting Date

ENR

Committee

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

54

Bill Number or Topic

686410

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name DAVID CULLEN

Phone 941-323-2404

Address 2838 LITTLEDEAN RD
Street

Email cullenasea@gmail.com

PLM
City

FL
State

32311
Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☒ Against ☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

SIERRA CLUB FLORIDA

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

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SB 0054

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Meeting Date

Committee

1/17/23
Environment & Natural Resources

Name

Isabella Nicolau

Phone

239-595-3371

Address

106 E. College Ave
Street

Email

isabellancag@gmail.com

Tallahassee
City

FL
State

32301
Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☒

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

League of
Women's Voters

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

54

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Meeting Date

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Committee

Name

Phone

Address

Email

Street

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☒

For

☐

Against

☐

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☐

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

1-17-23

Meeting Date

ENR

Committee

54

Bill Number or Topic

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name

DAVID CULLEN

Phone

941-323-2404

Address

2838 LITTLE DEAL RD

Email

cullenasea@gmail.com

Street

LLH

City

FL

State

32311

Zip

Speaking:

☐ For

☒ Against

☐ Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☐ In Support

☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☐

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☒

I am a registered lobbyist,
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SIERRA CLUB FLORIDA

☐

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This form is part of the public record for this meeting.

S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate
BILL ANALYSIS AND FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

(This document is based on the provisions contained in the legislation as of the latest date listed below.)

Prepared By: The Professional Staff of the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

BILL: CS/SB 54

INTRODUCER: Environment and Natural Resources Committee and Senator Rodriguez

SUBJECT: Land Acquisition Trust Fund

DATE: January 17, 2023

REVISED: _____

ANALYST	STAFF DIRECTOR	REFERENCE	ACTION
1. Carroll	Rogers	EN	Fav/CS
2. _____	_____	AEG	_____
3. _____	_____	AP	_____

Please see Section IX. for Additional Information:

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTE - Substantial Changes

I. Summary:

CS/SB 54 appropriates \$20 million from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) for the purpose of:

- Entering into financial assistance agreements with local governments located in the Florida Keys or the City of Key West Areas of Critical State Concern to promote the protection or restoration of Florida Bay, the Florida Keys, and nearshore marine ecosystems, including coral reefs; or
- Acquiring land within the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern with increased priority given to acquisitions that achieve a combination of conservation goals.

II. Present Situation:

The Florida Keys

The Florida Keys consist of more than 100 miles of small limestone islands formed from ancient coral reefs rising a few meters above sea level.¹ The Keys' tropical climate supports populations of rare and unique wildlife and plants that occur nowhere else in the world.² For example, the tropical hardwood hammocks in the Keys are the only tropical hardwood forests in the

¹ Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), *Florida Keys – Habitat and Management*, <https://myfwc.com/recreation/lead/florida-keys/habitat/> (last visited Jan. 12, 2023).

² *Id.*; FWC, *A Management Plan for the Florida Keys Wildlife and Environmental Area: 2016-2026*, 1 (Feb. 2016) available at <https://myfwc.com/media/5371/fkweamanagementplan2016-2026.pdf> (last visited Jan. 12, 2023).

continental U.S. and are the most imperiled plant communities in the world.³ The Keys also support many migratory bird species, along with imperiled and rare wildlife and plants including the Key deer, American crocodile, tree cactus, and four species of sea turtle.⁴ Because of its unique combination of tropical endemic rare and imperiled species and habitats, the conservation of the critical remaining natural lands in the Florida Keys has long been a commitment of the State of Florida, the federal government, the South Florida Water Management District, Monroe County, and many conservation organizations.⁵ Conservation helps to protect the Keys' Outstanding Florida Waters, its reefs and islands, its fisheries, and its ecotourism opportunities.⁶

Areas of Critical State Concern

The Governor and Cabinet, sitting as the Administration Commission,⁷ may designate certain areas within the state that contain resources of statewide or regional significance as areas of critical state concern.⁸ There are five designated areas of critical state concern: the Big Cypress,⁹ Green Swamp,¹⁰ Florida Keys, Key West,¹¹ and Apalachicola Bay Areas.¹²

The City of Key West and the Florida Keys Areas of Critical State Concern

The Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern includes the Village of Islamorada, the municipalities of Marathon, Layton and Key Colony Beach, and unincorporated Monroe County.¹³ Following litigation in 1984 to challenge the designation, the City of Key West was given its own area of critical state concern designation.¹⁴

By designating the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern, the legislature intended to:

- Establish a land-use management system that protects the natural environment, conserves and promotes the community character, promotes orderly and balanced growth in accordance with the capacity of available and planned public facilities and services, and promotes and supports a diverse and sound economic base in the Florida Keys;
- Provide affordable housing in close proximity to places of employment in the Florida Keys;
- Protect the constitutional rights of property owners to own, use, and dispose of their real property;
- Promote coordination and efficiency among governmental agencies that have permitting jurisdiction over land-use activities within the Florida Keys;
- Promote an appropriate land acquisition and protection strategy for environmentally sensitive lands within the Florida Keys;

³ FWC, *A Management Plan for the Florida Keys Wildlife and Environmental Area: 2016-2026* at 1.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*

⁶ *Id.* at 1-2.

⁷ Section 380.031(1), F.S.

⁸ Section 380.05, F.S.

⁹ Section 380.055, F.S.

¹⁰ Section 380.0551, F.S.

¹¹ Section 380.0552, F.S.

¹² Section 380.0555, F.S.

¹³ Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), *City of Key West and the Florida Keys Areas*, <https://floridajobs.org/community-planning-and-development/programs/community-planning-table-of-contents/areas-of-critical-state-concern/city-of-key-west-and-the-florida-keys> (last visited Jan. 6, 2023).

¹⁴ *Id.*

- Protect and improve the nearshore water quality of the Florida Keys through federal, state, and local funding of water quality improvement projects; and
- Ensure that the population of the Florida Keys can be safely evacuated.¹⁵

State, regional, and local agencies and units of government in the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern must coordinate development plans and conduct programs and activities consistent with principles for guiding development that:

- Strengthen local government capabilities for managing land use and development.
- Protect shoreline and marine resources.
- Protect upland resources, tropical biological communities, freshwater wetlands, native tropical vegetation, dune ridges and beaches, and wildlife.
- Ensure sound economic development.
- Limit the adverse impacts of development on water quality.
- Protect the historical heritage of the Florida Keys.
- Protect the value, efficiency, cost-effectiveness, and amortized life of existing and proposed major public investments.¹⁶
- Protect and improve water quality by providing for the construction, operation, maintenance, and replacement of stormwater management facilities; central sewage collection; treatment and disposal facilities; the installation and proper operation and maintenance of onsite sewage treatment and disposal systems; and other water quality and supply projects, including direct and indirect potable reuse.
- Ensure the improvement of nearshore water quality by requiring the construction and operation of wastewater management facilities, and by directing growth to areas served by central wastewater treatment facilities through permit allocation systems.
- Limit the adverse impacts of public investments on the environmental resources of the Florida Keys.
- Make available adequate affordable housing for all sectors of the population of the Florida Keys.
- Provide adequate alternatives for the protection of public safety and welfare in the event of a natural or manmade disaster and for a post-disaster reconstruction plan.
- Protect the public health, safety, and welfare of the citizens of the Florida Keys and maintain the Florida Keys as a unique Florida resource.¹⁷

Florida Keys Stewardship Act

The Florida Keys Stewardship Act revised various policies relating to local government environmental financing.¹⁸ The Act:

¹⁵ Section 380.0552, F.S.

¹⁶ These investment include the Florida Keys Aqueduct and water supply facilities; sewage collection, treatment, and disposal facilities, the Key West Naval Air Station and other military facilities; transportation facilities; federal parks, wildlife refuges, and marine sanctuaries; state parks, recreation facilities, aquatic preserves, and other publicly owned properties; city electric service and the Florida Keys Electric Co-op; and other utilities, as appropriate. Section 380.0552(7), F.S.

¹⁷ *Id.*

¹⁸ Chapter 2016-225, Laws of Fla.; Section 259.045, F.S.

- Required the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to annually consider the recommendations of the Department of Economic Opportunity relating to land purchases within an area of critical state concern;
- Required DEP to make recommendations to the Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund with respect to the purchase of fee or any lesser interest in specified types of lands;
- Allowed local governments and special districts within an area of critical state concern to recommend additional land purchases;
- Provided additional principles for guiding development within the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern;¹⁹
- Expanded the purposes for which the local government infrastructure surtax²⁰ can be used to include land acquisition by a county for public recreation, conservation, or protection of natural resources or to prevent or satisfy private property rights claims resulting from limitations imposed by the designation of an area of critical state concern;²¹ and
- Directed that, beginning in the 2017-2018 fiscal year and continuing through the 2026-2027 fiscal year, at least \$5 million from the Florida Forever Trust Fund must be spent on land acquisition within the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern.²²

Land Acquisition Trust Fund

Documentary stamp tax revenues are collected under ch. 201, F.S., which requires an excise tax to be levied on two classes of documents: deeds and other documents related to real property, which are taxed at the rate of 70 cents per \$100; and certificates of indebtedness, promissory notes, wage assignments, and retail charge account agreements, which are taxed at 35 cents per \$100.²³

In 2014, Florida voters approved Amendment One, a constitutional amendment to provide a dedicated funding source for land and water conservation and restoration.²⁴ The amendment required that starting on July 1, 2015, and for 20 years thereafter, 33 percent of net revenues derived from documentary stamp taxes be deposited into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund (LATF).²⁵ Article X, s. 28 of the State Constitution requires that funds in the LATF be expended only for the following purposes:

As provided by law, to finance or refinance: the acquisition and improvement of land, water areas, and related property interests, including conservation easements, and resources for conservation lands including wetlands, forests, and fish and wildlife habitat; wildlife management areas; lands that protect water resources and drinking water sources, including lands protecting the water quality and quantity of rivers, lakes, streams,

¹⁹ Chapter 2016-225, Laws of Fla.; Section 380.0552(7), F.S.

²⁰ The local government infrastructure surtax allows the governing authority in each county to levy a discretionary sales surtax of 0.5 percent or 1 percent. Section 212.055(2), F.S.

²¹ Chapter 2016-225, Laws of Fla.; Section 212.055(2), F.S.

²² Chapter 2016-225, Laws of Fla.; s. 259.105(3)(b), F.S.

²³ See ss. 201.02(1)(a) and 201.08(1)(a), F.S.

²⁴ The Florida Senate, *Water and Land Conservation*, <https://www.flsenate.gov/media/topics/WLC> (last visited Jan. 4, 2023).

²⁵ *Id.*

springsheds, and lands providing recharge for groundwater and aquifer systems; lands in the Everglades Agricultural Area and the Everglades Protection Area, as defined in Article II, Section 7(b); beaches and shores; outdoor recreation lands, including recreational trails, parks, and urban open space; rural landscapes; working farms and ranches; historic or geologic sites; together with management, restoration of natural systems, and the enhancement of public access or recreational enjoyment of conservation lands.²⁶

To implement Art. X, s. 28 of the State Constitution, the Legislature passed ch. 2015-229, Laws of Florida. This act, in part, amended the following sections of law:

- Section 201.15, F.S., to conform to the constitutional requirement that the LATF receive at least 33 percent of net revenues derived from documentary stamp taxes; and
- Section 375.041, F.S., to designate the LATF within DEP as the trust fund to serve as the constitutionally mandated depository for the percentage of documentary stamp tax revenues.²⁷

Under s. 375.041, F.S., funds deposited into the LATF must be distributed in the following order and amounts:

- First, obligations relating to debt service, specifically, payments relating to debt service on Florida Forever Bonds and Everglades restoration bonds.
- Then, unless superseded by the General Appropriations Act, before funds are authorized to be appropriated for other uses:
 - A minimum of the lesser of 25 percent of the funds remaining after the payment of debt service or \$200 million annually for Everglades projects that implement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan (CERP), the Long-Term Plan, or the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program (NEEPP), with priority given to Everglades restoration projects that reduce harmful discharges of water from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie or Caloosahatchee estuaries in a timely manner. From these funds, the following specified distributions are required:
 - \$32 million annually through the 2023-2024 fiscal year for the Long-Term Plan;
 - After deducting the \$32 million, the minimum of the lesser of 76.5 percent of the remainder or \$100 million annually through the 2025-2026 fiscal year for the CERP; and
 - Any remaining funds for Everglades projects under the CERP, the Long-Term Plan, or the NEEPP.
 - A minimum of the lesser of 7.6 percent of the funds remaining after the payment of debt service or \$50 million annually for spring restoration, protection, and management projects;
 - \$5 million annually through the 2025-2026 fiscal year to the St. Johns River Water Management District for projects dedicated to the restoration of Lake Apopka;
 - \$64 million to the Everglades Trust Fund in the 2018-2019 fiscal year and each fiscal year thereafter, for the Everglades Agricultural Area reservoir project, and any funds remaining in any fiscal year shall be made available only for Phase II of the C-51

²⁶ FLA. CONST. art. X, s. 28(b)(1).

²⁷ Ch. 2015-229, ss. 9 and 50, Laws of Fla.

- Reservoir Project or projects that implement the CERP, the Long Term Plan, or the NEEPP; and
 - \$50 million annually to the South Florida Water Management District for the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project.
- Then, any remaining moneys are authorized to be appropriated for the purposes set forth in Art. X, s. 28 of the State Constitution.²⁸

During the 2022 session, the Legislature added language that specifies that the purposes set forth in s. 375.041(3)(a)3., F.S., relating to Lake Apopka would instead be appropriated as provided in the General Appropriations Act.²⁹ In August 2022, the General Revenue Estimating Conference estimated that for fiscal year 2022-2023 a total of \$4.52 billion would be collected in documentary stamp taxes.³⁰ Thirty-three percent of the net revenues collected, or approximately \$1.49 billion, must be deposited into the LATF in accordance with Art. X, s. 28 of the State Constitution. Of that amount, \$124 million is committed to debt service, leaving \$1.36 billion to be distributed for the uses specified by s. 375.041, F.S., and other purposes in accordance with the General Appropriations Act.³¹

Litigation

In 2015, two lawsuits were filed challenging the constitutionality of appropriations from the LATF and expenditures by state agencies.³² The cases were consolidated and a hearing was held in June of 2018.³³ The plaintiffs argued that funds from the LATF were appropriated and expended for general state expenses in ways that were inconsistent with the State Constitution. The circuit court held for the plaintiffs, stating the amendment requires the funds be used for acquiring conservation lands, and for improving, managing, restoring, and enhancing public access to conservation lands acquired after the effective date of the amendment.³⁴ The decision described how the LATF funds may be used, and ruled that numerous appropriations from 2015 and 2016 were unconstitutional.³⁵

On appeal, the First District Court of Appeal overturned the circuit court ruling, holding that the LATF funds are not restricted to use on land purchased by the state after the constitutional amendment took effect in 2015.³⁶ The court held that the plain language in the Constitution authorizing the use of funds for management, restoration, and enhancement activities would specifically authorize use of the funds on activities beyond land acquisition.³⁷ The case was then

²⁸ Section 375.041(3)-(4), F.S.

²⁹ Chapter 2022-157, Laws of Fla.

³⁰ Office of Economic & Demographic Research, Revenue Estimating Conference, *Documentary Stamp Tax, Conference Results* (Aug. 2022), available at <http://edr.state.fl.us/Content/conferences/docstamp/docstampexecsummary.pdf> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023).

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Fla. Wildlife Fed'n v. Negron*, No. 2015-CA-001423 (Fla. 2nd Cir. Ct.); *Fla. Defenders of the Env't, Inc., v. Detzner*, No. 2015-CA-002682 (Fla. 2nd Cir. Ct.).

³³ *Fla. Wildlife Fed'n v. Negron*, Nos. 2015-CA-001423, 2015-CA-002682 (Fla. 2nd Cir. Ct. June 28, 2018).

³⁴ *Id.* at 3.

³⁵ *Id.* at 7–8.

³⁶ *Oliva v. Fla. Wildlife Fed'n*, 281 So. 3d 531, 539 (Fla. 1st Dist. Ct. App., 2019).

³⁷ *Id.* at 537.

remanded to the circuit court to rule on the legality of appropriations made since the enactment of the constitutional amendment.³⁸

The circuit court dismissed the lawsuit on January 3, 2022, finding that it was moot because the money approved by the Legislature in 2015 had already been spent.³⁹ On July 20, 2022, the Florida Wildlife Federation filed a motion to reopen the case.⁴⁰ The case is now on appeal in the First District Court of Appeal.⁴¹

III. Effect of Proposed Changes:

Section 1 amends s. 375.041, F.S., to appropriate \$20 million to the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to:

- Implement the Florida Keys Stewardship Act by entering into financial assistance agreements with local governments located in the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern or the City of Key West Area of Critical State Concern to promote the protection or restoration of Florida Bay, the Florida Keys, and nearshore marine ecosystems, including coral reefs; or
- Acquire land within the Florida Keys Area of Critical State Concern, giving increased priority to acquisitions that achieve a combination of conservation goals, including protecting water resources and natural groundwater recharge.

The bill requires the distribution of the \$20 million to be reduced by an amount equal to the debt service paid out of the LATF on bonds issued for these purposes after July 1, 2023.

The bill deletes obsolete language that directed LATF funds to be appropriated for the 2022-2023 fiscal year as provided in the General Appropriations Act.

Section 2 provides an effective date of July 1, 2023.

IV. Constitutional Issues:

A. Municipality/County Mandates Restrictions:

None.

B. Public Records/Open Meetings Issues:

None.

C. Trust Funds Restrictions:

See Present Situation.

³⁸ *Id.* at 539.

³⁹ *Fla Wildlife Fed'n v. Negron*, Nos. 2015-CA-001423, 2015-CA-002682 (Fla. 2nd Cir. Ct. Jan. 3, 2022), available at <https://www.politico.com/states/fl?id=0000017e-21d8-d3d7-a37f-afdee5cb0000&source=email> (last visited Jan. 5, 2023).

⁴⁰ Dep't of Environmental Protection, *Fla. Enviro. Cases August*, 1 (Aug. 2022) (on file with the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources).

⁴¹ *Fla. Wildlife Fed'n v. Fla. Legislature*, No. 1D22-3142 (Fla. 1st Dist. Ct. App., 2022).

D. State Tax or Fee Increases:

None.

V. Fiscal Impact Statement:**A. Tax/Fee Issues:**

None.

B. Private Sector Impact:

None.

C. Government Sector Impact:

The bill will have a positive fiscal impact of \$20 million to the Florida Keys area.

VI. Technical Deficiencies:

None.

VII. Related Issues:

None.

VIII. Statutes Affected:

This bill substantially amends section 375.041 of the Florida Statutes.

IX. Additional Information:**A. Committee Substitute – Statement of Substantial Changes:**

(Summarizing differences between the Committee Substitute and the prior version of the bill.)

CS by Environment and Natural Resources on January 17, 2023:

Removed the provision in the underlying bill that prohibits the Department of Environmental Protection from using funds appropriated by the bill to implement wastewater management projects or programs.

B. Amendments:

None.



686410

LEGISLATIVE ACTION

Senate	.	House
Comm: RCS	.	
01/17/2023	.	
	.	
	.	
	.	

The Committee on Environment and Natural Resources (Rodriguez)
recommended the following:

Senate Amendment (with title amendment)

Delete lines 120 - 123
and insert:

b. The distribution must be reduced by an amount equal to

===== T I T L E A M E N D M E N T =====

And the title is amended as follows:

Delete lines 8 - 10



686410

10 and insert:
11 State Concern for specified purposes;

By Senator Rodriguez

40-00244-23

202354__

A bill to be entitled
An act relating to the Land Acquisition Trust Fund;
amending s. 375.041, F.S.; requiring an annual
appropriation from the Land Acquisition Trust Fund to
the Department of Environmental Protection to
implement the Florida Keys Stewardship Act or to
acquire land within the Florida Keys Area of Critical
State Concern for specified purposes; prohibiting the
department from using the appropriated funds to
implement wastewater management projects or programs;
requiring the distribution to be reduced by a
specified amount; deleting obsolete language;
providing an effective date.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Florida:

Section 1. Subsection (3) of section 375.041, Florida
Statutes, is amended to read:

375.041 Land Acquisition Trust Fund.—

(3) Funds distributed into the Land Acquisition Trust Fund
pursuant to s. 201.15 shall be applied:

(a) First, to pay debt service or to fund debt service
reserve funds, rebate obligations, or other amounts payable with
respect to Florida Forever bonds issued under s. 215.618; and
pay debt service, provide reserves, and pay rebate obligations
and other amounts due with respect to Everglades restoration
bonds issued under s. 215.619; and

(b) Of the funds remaining after the payments required
under paragraph (a), but before funds may be appropriated,

40-00244-23

202354__

pledged, or dedicated for other uses:

1. A minimum of the lesser of 25 percent or \$200 million shall be appropriated annually for Everglades projects that implement the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan as set forth in s. 373.470, including the Central Everglades Planning Project subject to Congressional authorization; the Long-Term Plan as defined in s. 373.4592(2); and the Northern Everglades and Estuaries Protection Program as set forth in s. 373.4595. From these funds, \$32 million shall be distributed each fiscal year through the 2023-2024 fiscal year to the South Florida Water Management District for the Long-Term Plan as defined in s. 373.4592(2). After deducting the \$32 million distributed under this subparagraph, from the funds remaining, a minimum of the lesser of 76.5 percent or \$100 million shall be appropriated each fiscal year through the 2025-2026 fiscal year for the planning, design, engineering, and construction of the Comprehensive Everglades Restoration Plan as set forth in s. 373.470, including the Central Everglades Planning Project, the Everglades Agricultural Area Storage Reservoir Project, the Lake Okeechobee Watershed Project, the C-43 West Basin Storage Reservoir Project, the Indian River Lagoon-South Project, the Western Everglades Restoration Project, and the Picayune Strand Restoration Project. The Department of Environmental Protection and the South Florida Water Management District shall give preference to those Everglades restoration projects that reduce harmful discharges of water from Lake Okeechobee to the St. Lucie or Caloosahatchee estuaries in a timely manner. For the purpose of performing the calculation provided in this subparagraph, the amount of debt service paid pursuant to

40-00244-23

202354__

paragraph (a) for bonds issued after July 1, 2016, for the purposes set forth under this paragraph shall be added to the amount remaining after the payments required under paragraph (a). The amount of the distribution calculated shall then be reduced by an amount equal to the debt service paid pursuant to paragraph (a) on bonds issued after July 1, 2016, for the purposes set forth under this subparagraph.

2. A minimum of the lesser of 7.6 percent or \$50 million shall be appropriated annually for spring restoration, protection, and management projects. For the purpose of performing the calculation provided in this subparagraph, the amount of debt service paid pursuant to paragraph (a) for bonds issued after July 1, 2016, for the purposes set forth under this paragraph shall be added to the amount remaining after the payments required under paragraph (a). The amount of the distribution calculated shall then be reduced by an amount equal to the debt service paid pursuant to paragraph (a) on bonds issued after July 1, 2016, for the purposes set forth under this subparagraph.

3. The sum of \$5 million shall be appropriated annually each fiscal year through the 2025-2026 fiscal year to the St. Johns River Water Management District for projects dedicated to the restoration of Lake Apopka. This distribution shall be reduced by an amount equal to the debt service paid pursuant to paragraph (a) on bonds issued after July 1, 2016, for the purposes set forth in this subparagraph.

4. The sum of \$64 million is appropriated and shall be transferred to the Everglades Trust Fund for the 2018-2019 fiscal year, and each fiscal year thereafter, for the EAA

40-00244-23

202354__

88 reservoir project pursuant to s. 373.4598. Any funds remaining
89 in any fiscal year shall be made available only for Phase II of
90 the C-51 reservoir project or projects identified in
91 subparagraph 1. and must be used in accordance with laws
92 relating to such projects. Any funds made available for such
93 purposes in a fiscal year are in addition to the amount
94 appropriated under subparagraph 1. This distribution shall be
95 reduced by an amount equal to the debt service paid pursuant to
96 paragraph (a) on bonds issued after July 1, 2017, for the
97 purposes set forth in this subparagraph.

98 5. The sum of \$50 million shall be appropriated annually to
99 the South Florida Water Management District for the Lake
100 Okeechobee Watershed Restoration Project in accordance with s.
101 373.4599. This distribution must be reduced by an amount equal
102 to the debt service paid pursuant to paragraph (a) on bonds
103 issued after July 1, 2021, for the purposes set forth in this
104 subparagraph.

105 6.a.6. The sum of \$20 million shall be appropriated
106 annually to the Department of Environmental Protection for the
107 purpose of:

108 (I) Implementing the Florida Keys Stewardship Act, chapter
109 2016-225, Laws of Florida, by entering into financial assistance
110 agreements with local governments located in the Florida Keys
111 Area of Critical State Concern or the City of Key West Area of
112 Critical State Concern to promote the protection or restoration
113 of Florida Bay, the Florida Keys, and nearshore marine
114 ecosystems, including coral reefs; or

115 (II) Acquiring land within the Florida Keys Area of
116 Critical State Concern as authorized pursuant to s. 259.045,

40-00244-23

202354__

with increased priority given to acquisitions that achieve a combination of conservation goals, including protecting this state's water resources and natural groundwater recharge.

b. Notwithstanding any other law, the department may not use the appropriated funds to implement wastewater management projects or programs.

c. The distribution must be reduced by an amount equal to the debt service paid pursuant to paragraph (a) on bonds issued after July 1, 2023, for the purposes set forth in this subparagraph ~~Notwithstanding subparagraph 3., for the 2022-2023 fiscal year, funds shall be appropriated as provided in the General Appropriations Act. This subparagraph expires July 1, 2023.~~

Section 2. This act shall take effect July 1, 2023.

OneFLORIDA

PROTECTING FLORIDA TOGETHER

FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

Senate Environment and Natural Resources Committee



January 17, 2023

FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

OVERVIEW



Florida has nearly 2.5 million acres of seagrasses.

- ✓ Critical habitat in Florida estuaries for marine species.
- ✓ Improve water quality and clarity, trap sediments and filter out nutrients.
- ✓ Provide natural buffer to reduce wave action from major storms.
- ✓ Vital for commercial and recreational fisheries.



FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

CHANGE STARTS WITH PARTNERS



- Florida Department of Environmental Protection
- Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), Fish and Wildlife Research Institute
- Universities
- National Estuary Programs
- Citizen Science
- NGOs

FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

BIOLOGICAL MONITORING AND MAPPING



Agencies and organizations, including our Aquatic Preserves, conduct regular monitoring of seagrass beds to understand changes in extent, species, density and other changes.

Changes are documented and mapped geospatially to better understand status and trends of seagrass health.

Aquatic Preserves also partner with research entities to understand effects of water quality, excessive algae impacts, reproduction efforts and other physiological characteristics.



FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

THREATS



WATER QUALITY



PROP SCARRING VESSEL GROUNDINGS



FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

WATER QUALITY



950 | Projects

511,210 | LBS TP, Per Year

2.7 | Million LBS TN, Per Year

Robust water quality monitoring programs help to identify pollutants that can impact waterbodies.

Basin management action plans (BMAPs) include strategies to reduce wastewater and stormwater impacts and limit nutrients in discharges to meet the adopted restoration targets, known as total maximum daily loads (TMDLs).

BMAPs for estuarine systems use seagrass coverage to measure restoration success.

Since 2019, the State has invested \$1.6 billion in water quality improvement projects statewide, including coastal communities.

FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

RESTORATION- PHYSICAL IMPACTS



Boater education and restoration can help impacted seagrass areas recover.

Agencies and organizations, including our Aquatic Preserves:

- ✓ Restore damage caused by prop scars or vessel groundings within seagrass beds.
- ✓ Increase awareness to help prevent impacts.
- ✓ Coordinate on regulatory matters.



FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

BIVALVE AND SEAGRASS PROJECT



In 2022, the Legislature provided over \$9 million to multiple projects to restore bivalves and seagrasses.

Agencies and partners are coordinating bivalve and seagrass studies across Florida.

Goals include:

- ✓ Provide a coordinated statewide effort.
- ✓ Develop best management practices through regionally replicated research.
- ✓ Identify and prioritize research needs.
- ✓ Collect comparable data using consistent protocols.
- ✓ Synthesize results.
- ✓ Disseminate information to stakeholders.

FLORIDA'S SEAGRASSES

RESTORATION- PERMITTING



DEP is pursuing the development of an Environmental Resource General Permit (Chapter 62-330, Florida Administrative Code) for the authorization of seagrass restoration activities, streamlining and expediting the permitting process for these beneficial projects.

- Workgroup (three meetings held August 2022).
- Notice of Rule Development published on Oct. 11, 2022.
- Rule Development Workshop anticipated Spring 2023.

While this rulemaking is underway, seagrass restoration projects can still be authorized by either existing Environmental Resource General Permits or Individual Permits.





THANK YOU

**ALEX REED
DIRECTOR**

OFFICE of RESILIENCE AND COASTAL PROTECTION

The Florida Senate
APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

1/17/23
Meeting Date

ENR
Committee

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name Alex Reed, DEP Director of Resilience & Coastal Protection Phone _____

Address 3900 Commonwealth Blvd
Street

Email _____

Tallahassee
City

FL
State

Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☒ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☒ I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☐ I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐ I am not a lobbyist, but received
something of value for my appearance
(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

This form is part of the public record for this meeting.

S-001 (08/10/2021)

Florida Wildlife Corridor Presentation

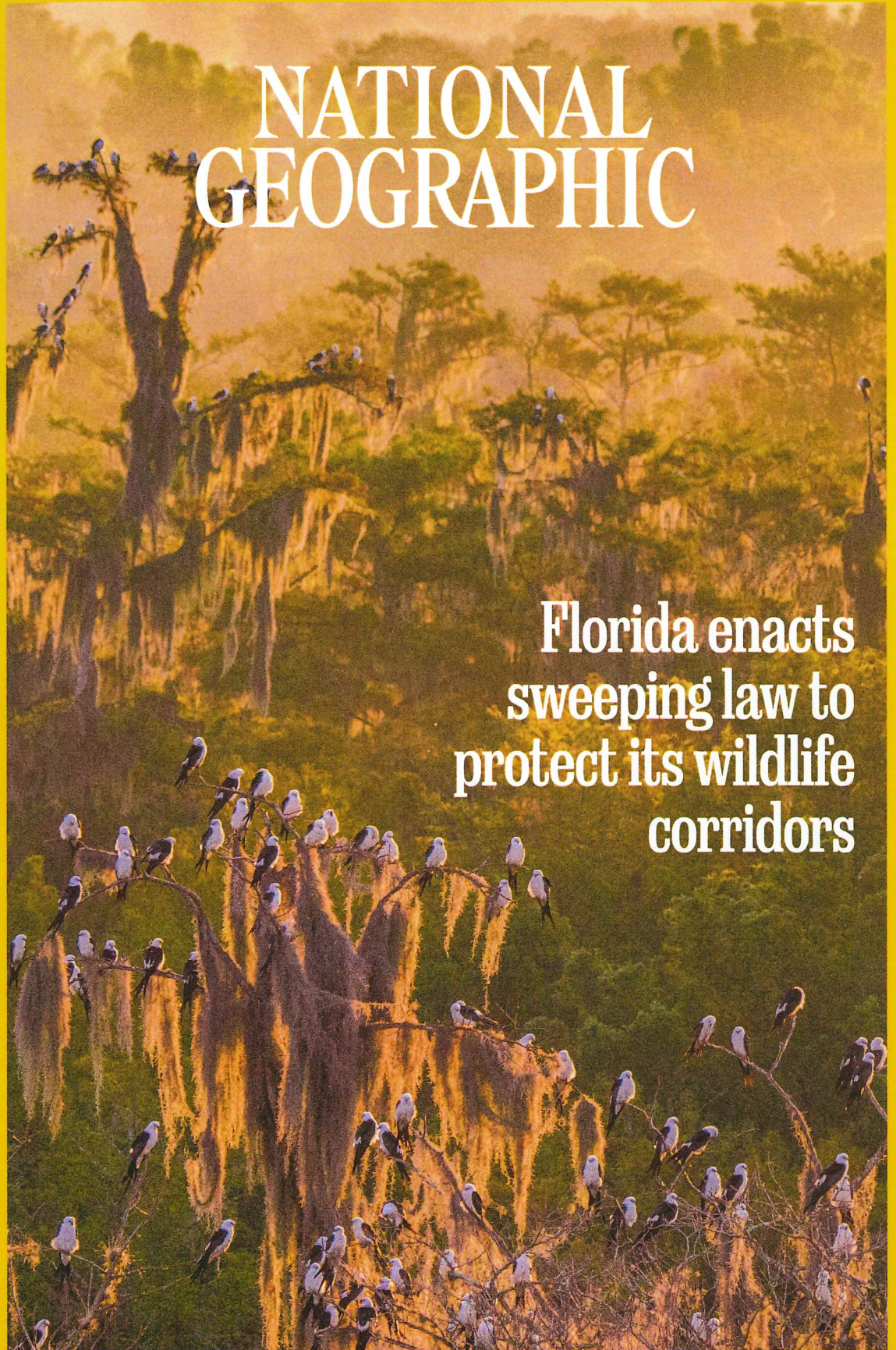
Link to 10 minute video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K9-7WEPyZ4o>

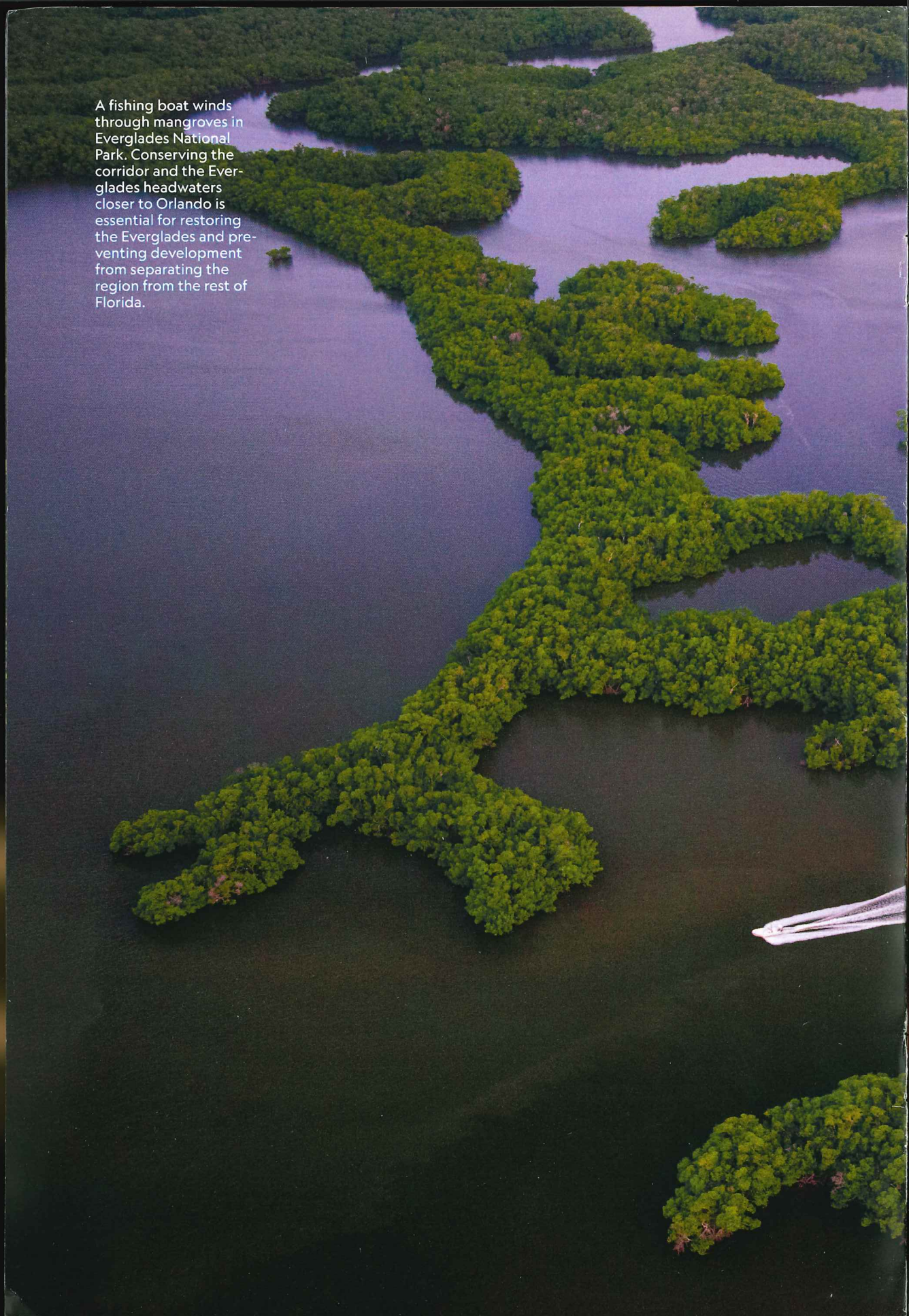
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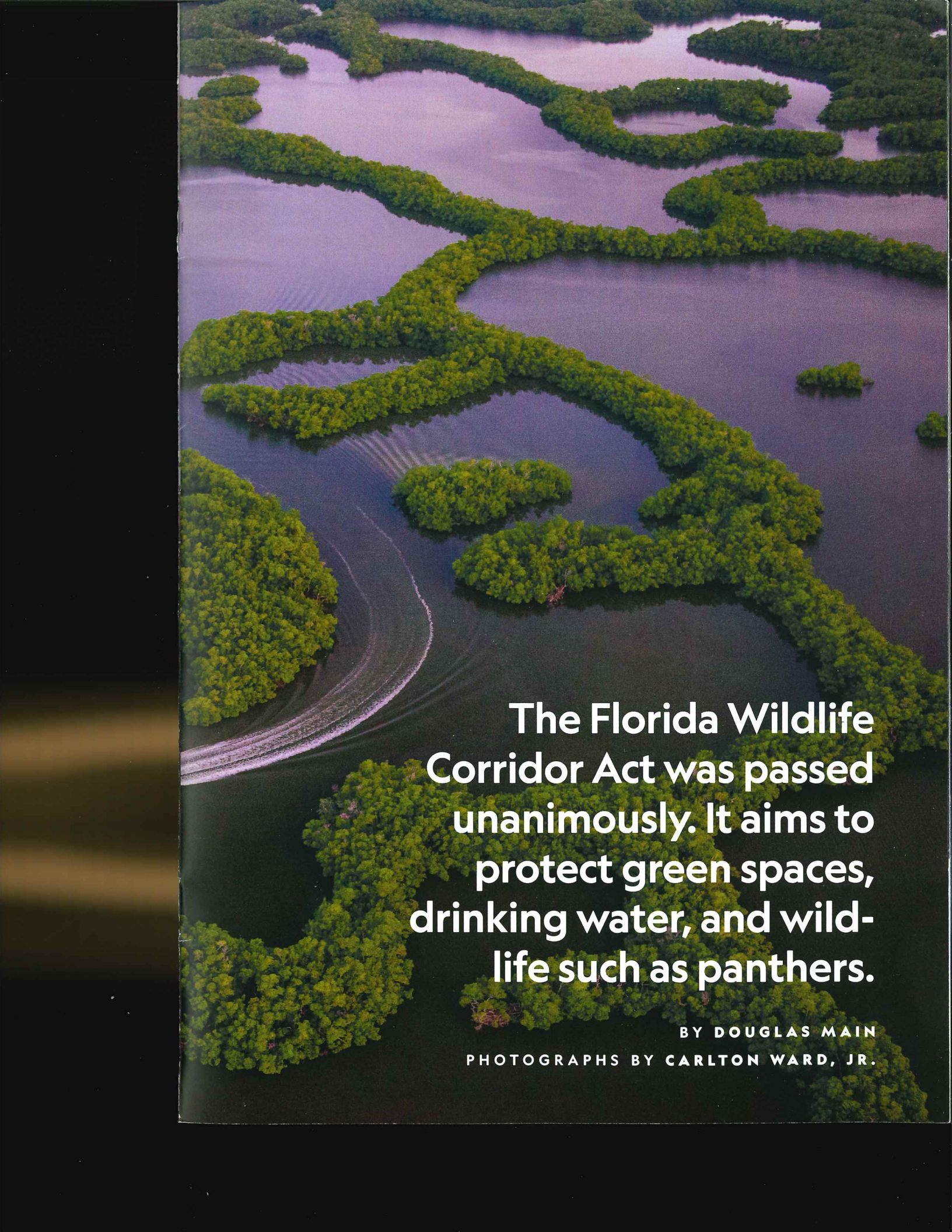
NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

Florida enacts
sweeping law to
protect its wildlife
corridors



A fishing boat winds through mangroves in Everglades National Park. Conserving the corridor and the Everglades headwaters closer to Orlando is essential for restoring the Everglades and preventing development from separating the region from the rest of Florida.





**The Florida Wildlife
Corridor Act was passed
unanimously. It aims to
protect green spaces,
drinking water, and wild-
life such as panthers.**

BY DOUGLAS MAIN

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CARLTON WARD, JR.

FLORIDA MADE CONSERVATION HISTORY

by enacting a bill and securing \$400 million in funding to help protect the state's vast network of natural areas.

Known as the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act, the legislation passed the Florida State Senate and House unanimously in late April. It was signed by Governor Ron DeSantis on the evening of June 29.

The act formally recognizes the existence of the Florida wildlife corridor, an interconnected web of green spaces throughout much of the state that includes forests, swamps, fields, pastures, timberlands, and even the edges of suburbs.

These areas are crucial for the existence of Florida's rich wildlife, especially wide-ranging species such as Florida panthers, black bears, otters, alligators, and many types of birds. Habitat fragmentation, caused by roads and development, is one of the most critical but least recognized threats to biodiversity.

Along with the bill, the legislature has also earmarked \$300 million toward protecting lands within the corridor, which can be used to fund conservation easements on private property or acquire land. That's in addition to \$100 million allocated generally to the main state's land conservation program, called Florida Forever, which functions similarly, though over a slightly broader geographic area.

The act is also intended to protect agricultural lands from development, to provide for continued recreational access to natural areas, and to safeguard clean water and air. That's vital in the third most populous state, where an average of nearly a thousand people move every day.

"It's the best hope we got," says Cary Lightsey, a sixth-generation cattle rancher who lives near Lake Kissimmee, of the corridor bill. Protecting these lands will "keep our natural resources going, protect our endangered species, and most of all, the landscape." (Read more: How America's most endangered cat could help save Florida.)

For an environmental bill to pass with unanimous bipartisan support is unusual in today's political climate, but it shows that land conservation, and specifically wildlife corridors, can



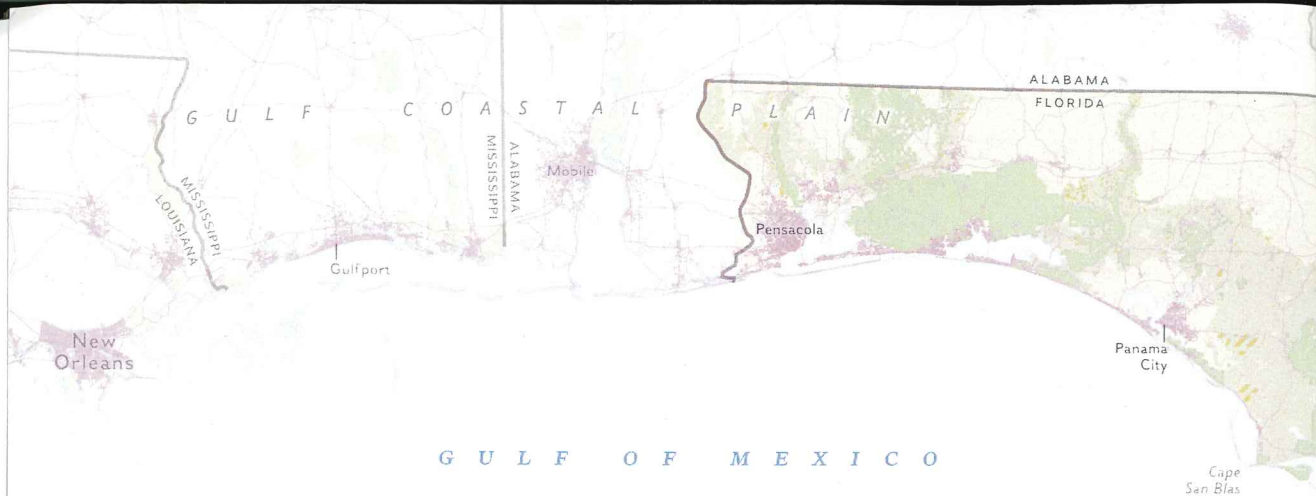
 **The National Geographic Society,** committed to illuminating and protecting the wonder of our world, funded the work of Explorer Carlton Ward, Jr.





A Florida panther walks among cypress trees during the dry season in Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. To survive, the endangered species must expand

to the north, a process that has already started, but which depends on preserving private lands within the corridor.



transcend partisan divisions, says Jason Lauritsen, executive director of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Coalition.

"It's an issue of marrying green infrastructure and a healthy ecosystem with vibrant economies," Lauritsen says.

Many see it as part of a broader evolution in conservation planning, in which people worldwide are increasingly realizing the importance of landscape connectivity, says Tori Linder, a conservationist and managing director with Path of the Panther, an organization supported by the National Geographic Society that works to protect the corridor and helped lead the effort to pass the bill.

Linder says that some other states have made various moves to recognize and protect their wildlife corridors—such as New Hampshire, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, and Virginia—but none has made this level of investment.

"The bipartisan passage of the Florida Wildlife Corridor Act presents a model for sustainable development nationally, one in which nature and people can thrive together. And that's incredibly exciting," Linder says.

Defining the corridor

The new law specifies what qualifies to be part of the Florida wildlife corridor. To do so, it uses information from the Florida Ecological Greenways network, a massive collection of data managed by Tom Hctor, director of the Center for Landscape Conservation Planning at the University of Florida.

That data, which includes animal movements, ecological measurements, habitat type, water availability, and many other factors, helps

determine what areas are most needed for wildlife to thrive. In all, the corridor encompasses 18 million acres of land, of which 10 million acres are currently protected.

Many species, including Florida panthers, need corridors to disperse, find mates, and maintain their large home ranges.

These endangered cats nearly went extinct by the 1970s, but bounced back following an infusion of genes from five Texas mountain lions in the 1990s. In 2016, a female was seen north of the Caloosahatchee River, a major waterway that runs from Fort Myers toward Lake Okeechobee, for the first time in 43 years.


This milestone suggests the species is moving north—which it must to survive long-term, a future that's only possible with protected wildlife corridors.

Beyond panthers, most animals and plants rely, to some degree, upon connected landscapes to disperse and maintain genetic diversity.

The bill's passing is the culmination of a long quest by Carlton Ward, Jr., a photographer and National Geographic Explorer who founded the Florida Wildlife Corridor campaign in 2010 and Path of the Panther in 2016. In recent years, Ward has explored much of Florida's wildlife corridor, trekking more than 2,000 miles throughout the state and photographing wildlife, including the elusive Florida panther.

"This gives me a lot of hope for the future of land conservation in Florida," Ward says.

Lightsey and Hctor both said the COVID-19 pandemic served as a wake-up call to the state, as many more people have flocked to Florida and to the countryside, putting more strain on rural areas.



A panther uses a newly added ledge to cross under State Road 80 near LaBelle, just south of Florida's Caloosahatchee River. Conservation easements have protected several ranches to the north and south in perpetuity. Panthers need to be able to cross below roads to move from protected lands in the south to new territory in the north. This photo was taken using infrared light, outside the visible spectrum, to avoid disturbing the cats.



"Everybody wants to live in the country [now]," Lightsey says. "It don't look good if we don't get rolling on this real quick."

But many caution there's more work ahead. For example, though the bill's passing is exciting and hopeful, the funding needs to be sustained over time to have a real impact, Hctor says.

Wilton Simpson, the Republican president of the State Senate—who helped the bill get passed and funded—says he hopes to secure "a similar level of funding" next year as well. "We're very proud we got this done," he says.

Meanwhile, developmental pressures are urgent. In 2019 a network of toll roads was proposed, called M-CORES, that would build more than 300 miles of roads cutting through some of the last undeveloped swaths of the state. Though the M-CORES project is on hold, conservationists are concerned new roads such as these or others could lead to further degradation of the land and damage the integrity of the Florida wildlife corridor.

Linder says that although she felt a sense of accomplishment when the corridor bill finally passed, it didn't last long.

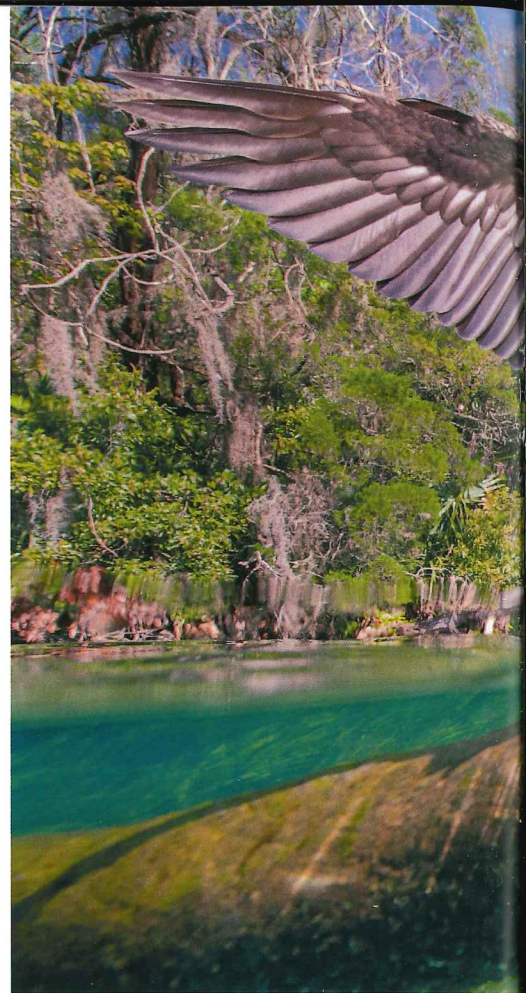
"It's just the beginning of what needs to happen," Linder says. "Every state needs to work to protect wildlife corridors."

Jill Tiefenthaler, chief executive officer for the National Geographic Society, concurs. "Hopefully the success of this project will inspire change throughout the country and the world."

Working together

In Florida, where development pressure is intense, ranchers and those working in agriculture often have more in common with environmentalists than in some other states, says Lightsey.

For instance, Lightsey has put more than 90 percent of his ranch in easements. The state pays him about 50 to 60 percent of the land's appraised value, and in return, the land can never be developed. Easement owners are responsible for managing the land and paying property taxes, though often at reduced rates, and can receive some tax benefits such as deductions. □



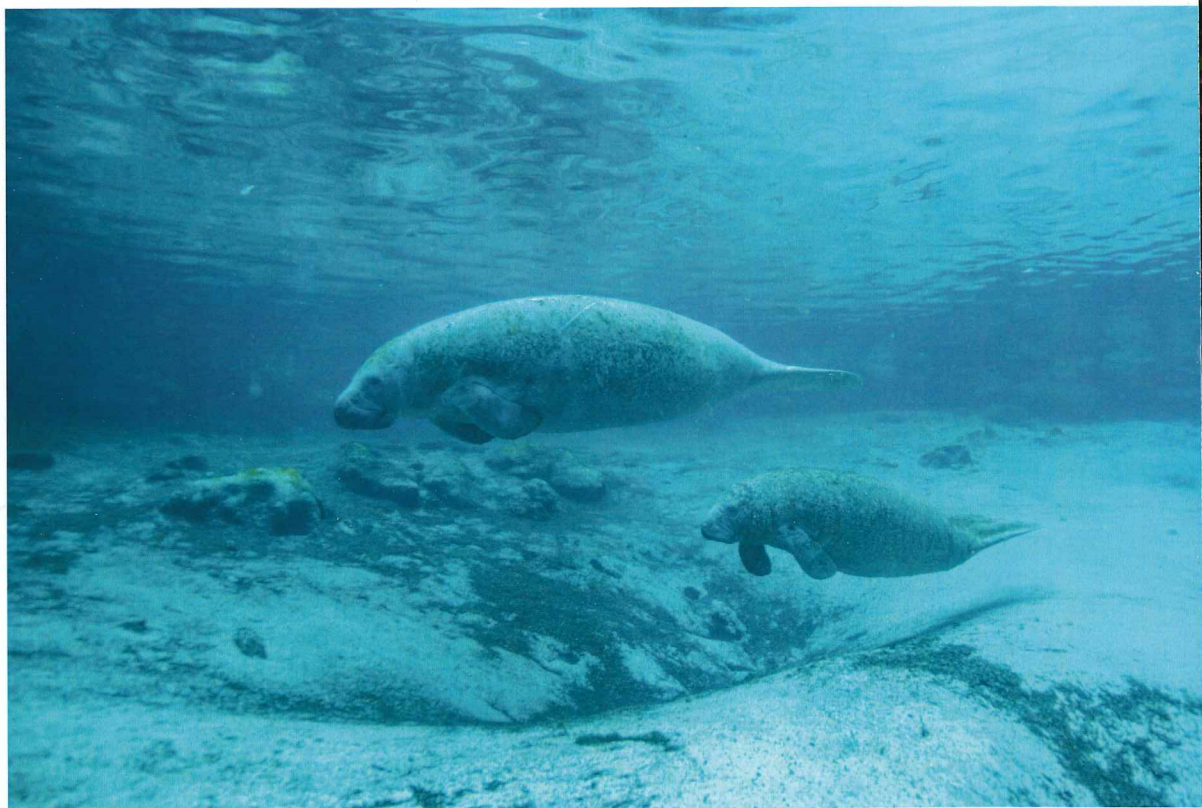
RIGHT

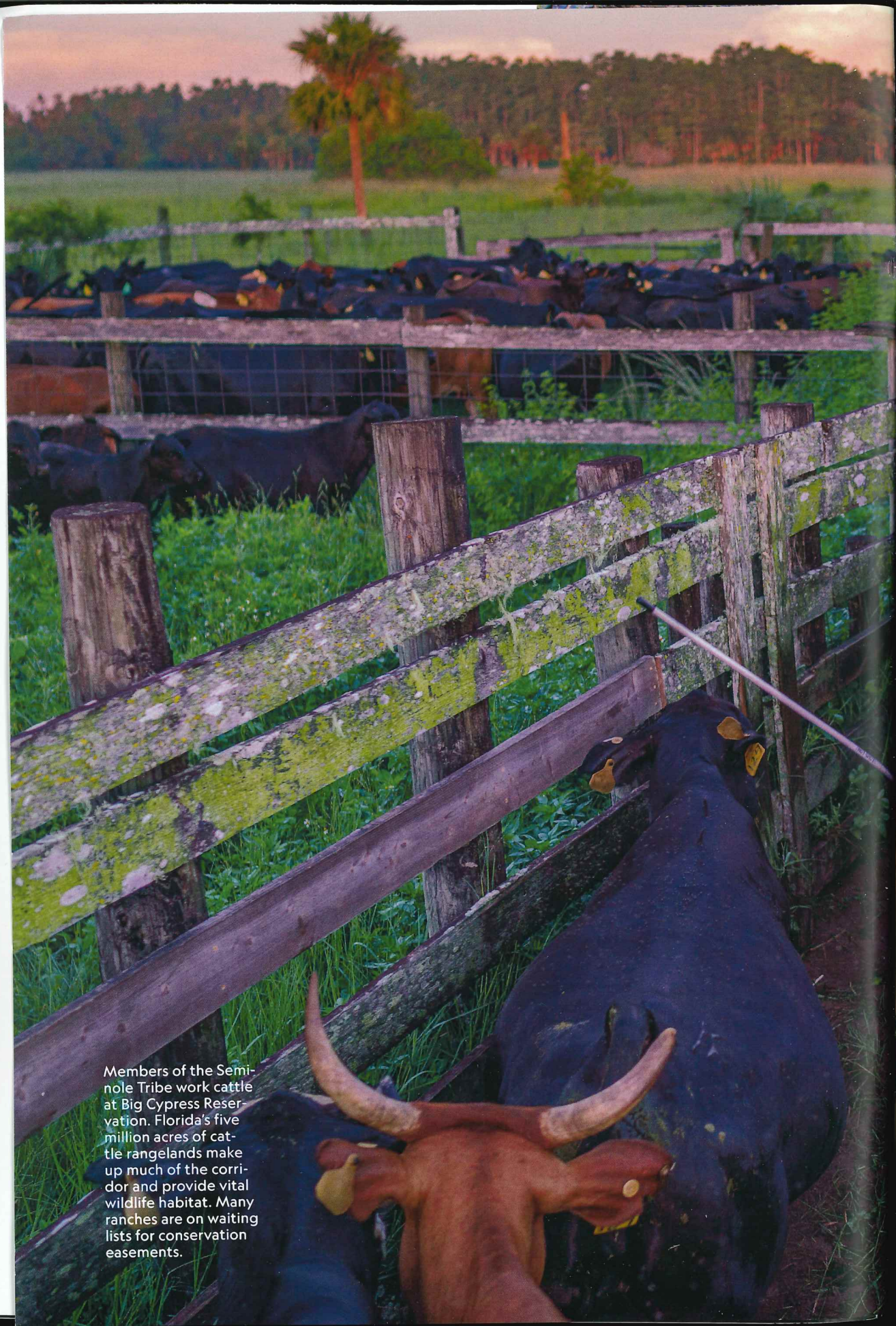
A manatee mother and calf explore a spring in Crystal River National Wildlife Refuge. Such springs provide warm refuges during winter. Conserving the corridor helps these endangered mammals by keeping springs and estuaries connected and clean.



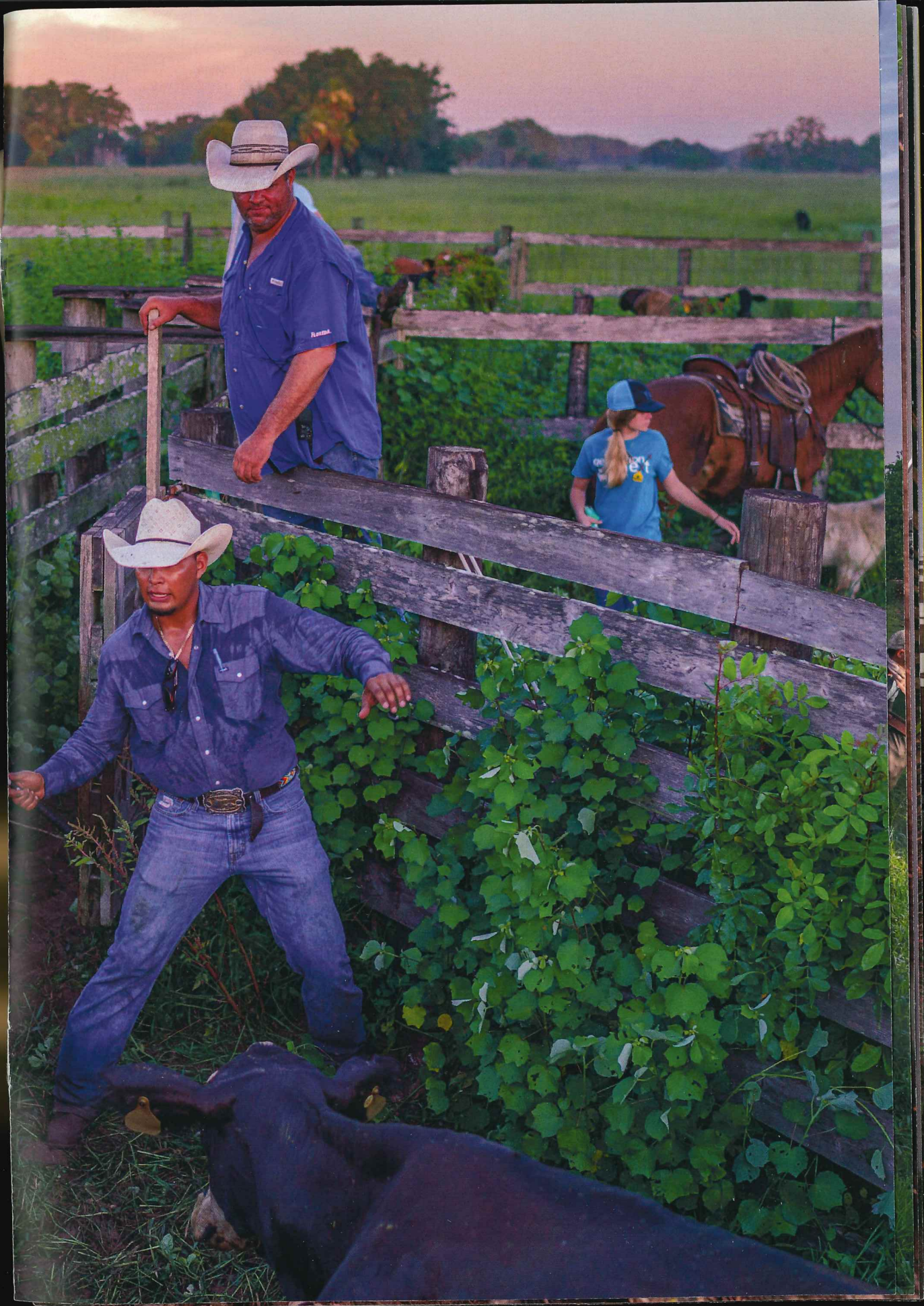
LEFT


A double-crested cormorant dries its wings while perched on a fallen palm in the Rainbow River, near Dunnellon, north of Tampa. The Florida wildlife corridor protects nearly 10 million acres of public land, including Rainbow River State Park.



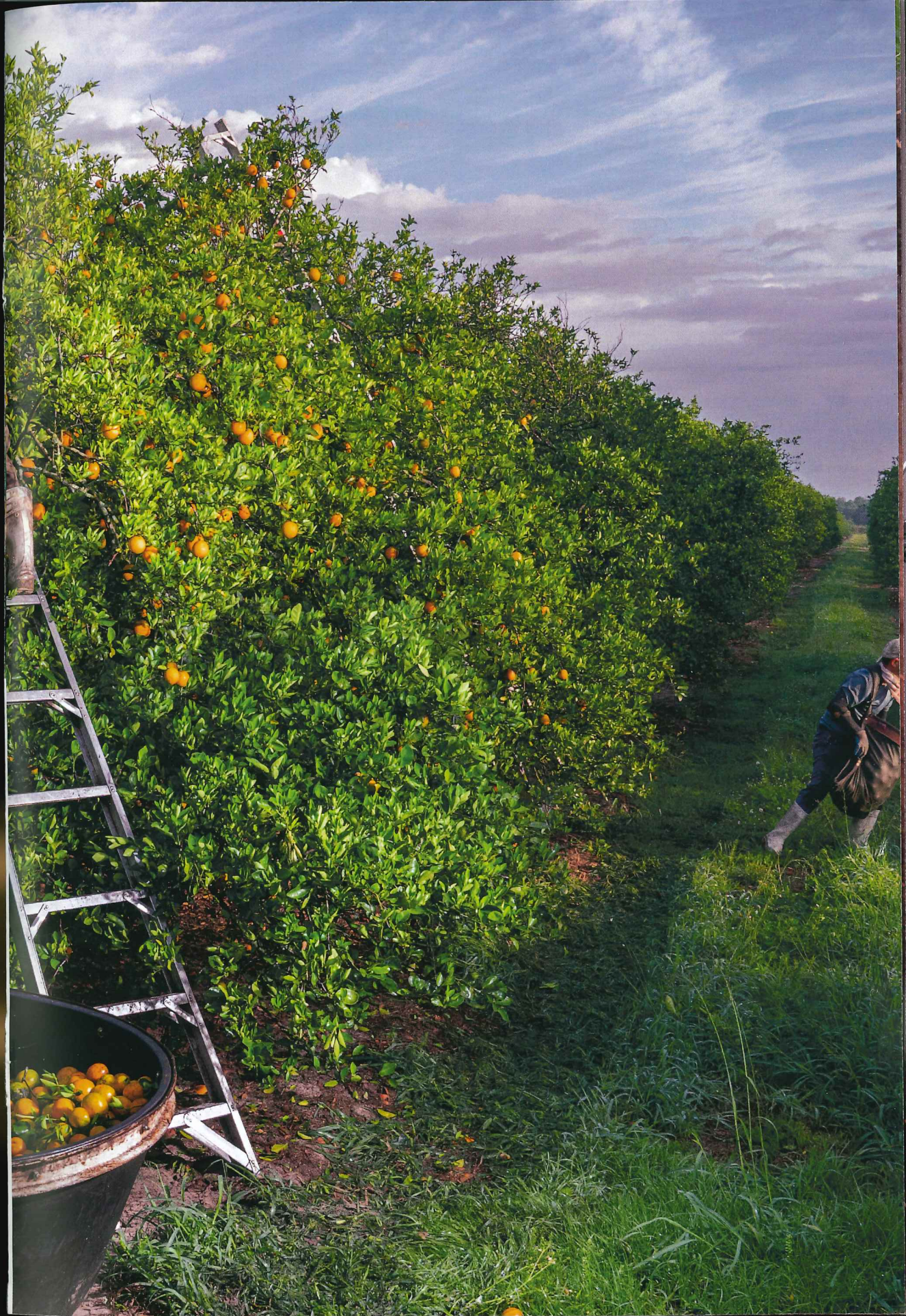


Members of the Seminole Tribe work cattle at Big Cypress Reservation. Florida's five million acres of cattle rangelands make up much of the corridor and provide vital wildlife habitat. Many ranches are on waiting lists for conservation easements.



A photograph of an orange grove. A man is visible on a ladder, harvesting oranges from a tree. In the foreground, a large, dark metal bowl is filled with harvested oranges. The trees are lush green and covered with ripe, orange-colored fruit. The sky is visible in the background, showing some clouds.

Panthers are known to move through this citrus grove in south-central Florida, within the wildlife corridor. The Nature Conservancy paid for a conservation easement with the grove owner to ensure the property will never be developed—a win for panthers and agriculture.





A black bear and her cubs scratch at a log in Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge. This area acts as a wildlife corridor between conservation lands to the south and ranch land to the north.






Staff at the White Oak Conservation Center carry two sedated kittens whose mother, FP224, suffered a broken leg after being struck by a car. The mother was nursed back to health, and the family was returned to the wild. Shortly after their release, however, the kittens were killed when they were hit by cars in southwestern Florida.



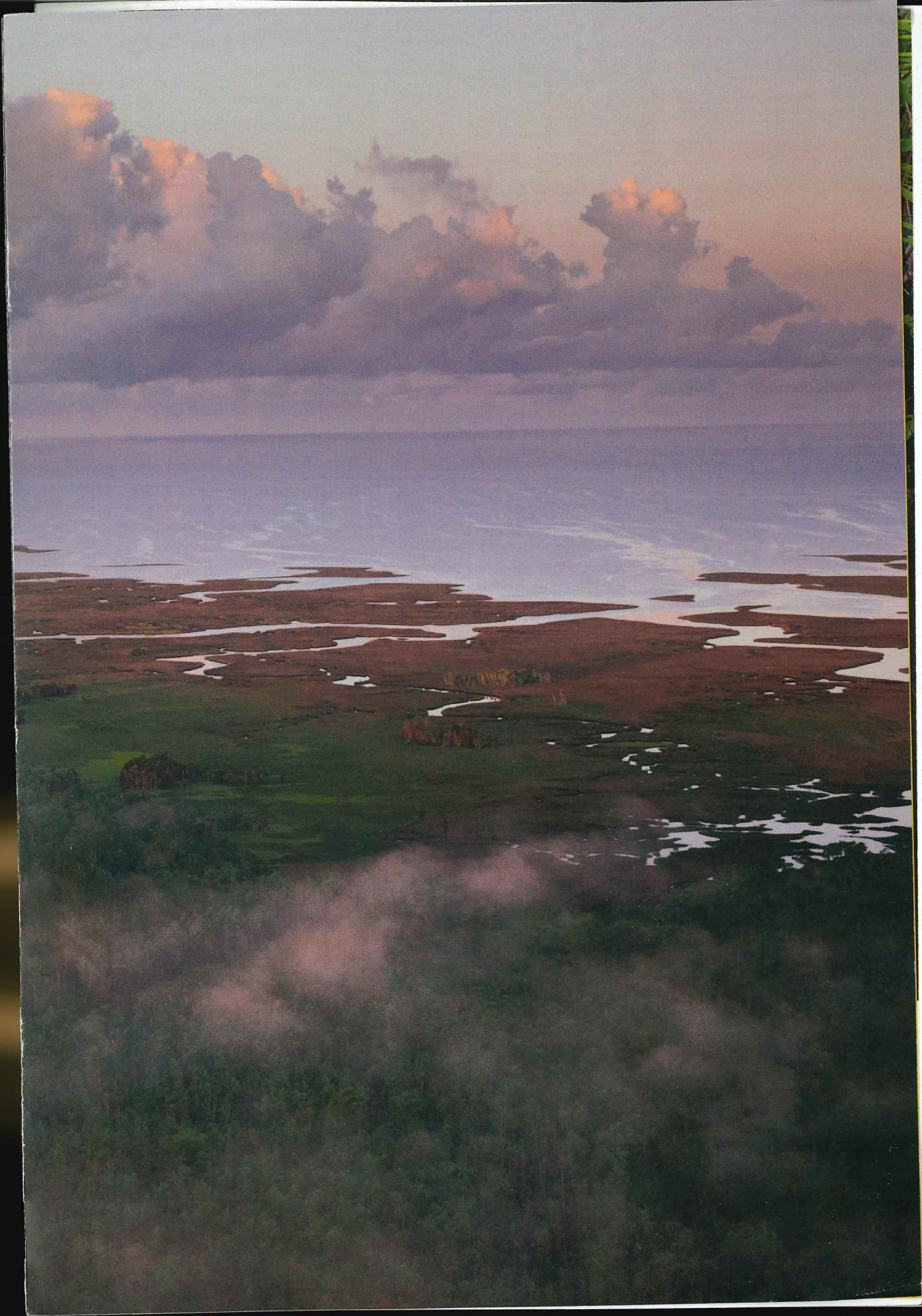
A female cougar is shown in profile, standing on a forest floor covered with dry pine needles and twigs. She is looking towards the left. To her left is a large, green palm frond. The background is dark, with some tree trunks visible. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the cougar's fur and the palm frond.


The first female
panther spotted north
of the Caloosahatchee
River since 1973 pauses
on Babcock Ranch
Preserve with her kitten.
Once at risk of wide-
spread development,
this area was set aside
as mostly protected
land in 2006.





The Aucilla River winds through forest and salt marsh on its way to the Gulf of Mexico. The Florida Wildlife Corridor connects with nearly 1,000 named rivers and streams, is vital for providing clean drinking water, and helps maintain healthy estuaries in the Gulf and Atlantic Ocean.





The Florida panther — the last population of puma in the eastern United States — is back from the brink of extinction. The population has rebounded from as few as 20 to nearly 200 today. But to ever reach sustainable numbers, panthers need access to more of their historic territory throughout Florida and beyond. Conserving a network of public and private lands known as the Florida Wildlife Corridor is panther's best path to recovery.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT

| [PATHOFTHEPANTHER.ORG](https://pathofthepanther.org)

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The Florida Senate

APPEARANCE RECORD

Deliver both copies of this form to
Senate professional staff conducting the meeting

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Meeting Date

1/21/23
Env + Nat Res

Committee

Name

Carlton Ward Jr

Phone

722-542-4092

Address

520 E Davis BL

Email

carlton@wildpath.com

Street

Tampa

FL

33606

City

State

Zip

Speaking:

☐

For

☐

Against

☒

Information

OR

Waive Speaking:

☐

In Support

☐

Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

☒

I am appearing without
compensation or sponsorship.

☐

I am a registered lobbyist,
representing:

☐

I am not a lobbyist, but received
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(travel, meals, lodging, etc.),
sponsored by:

While it is a tradition to encourage public testimony, time may not permit all persons wishing to speak to be heard at this hearing. Those who do speak may be asked to limit their remarks so that as many persons as possible can be heard. If you have questions about registering to lobby please see Fla. Stat. §11.045 and Joint Rule 1. [2020-2022 Joint Rules.pdf \(flsenate.gov\)](#)

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S-001 (08/10/2021)

The Florida Senate
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Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

1/17/2023
Meeting Date

Senate Env + Nat Res
Committee

Name Mallory Dimmitt

Phone 727-480-0554

Address 2606 S. Fairfield, Bldg #7
Street

Email mallory@floridawildlife.com
Org

St. Petersburg FL 33712
City State Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☒ Information

OR

Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

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1/17/23
Meeting Date

Committee

Bill Number or Topic

Amendment Barcode (if applicable)

Name TRACI DEEN Phone 786 241 3113

Address 37 N Orange Ave Ste 323 Email traci@conservationfla.org
Street
Orlando FL 32801
City State Zip

Speaking: ☐ For ☐ Against ☒ Information **OR** Waive Speaking: ☐ In Support ☐ Against

PLEASE CHECK ONE OF THE FOLLOWING:

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CourtSmart Tag Report

Room: SB 301
Caption: Senate Environment & Natural Resources Committee

Case No.:

Type:
Judge:

Started: 1/17/2023 1:33:34 PM

Ends: 1/17/2023 2:29:32 PM

Length: 00:55:59

1:33:34 PM	Call to order & Pledge of Allegiance
1:33:35 PM	Chair Rodriguez introduces herself
1:33:48 PM	Madam Vice Chair is next to introduce herself
1:34:03 PM	Sen. Mayfield introduces herself
1:34:30 PM	Sen. Powell is recognized to introduce himself
1:34:31 PM	
1:34:57 PM	Sen. Polsky introduces herself
1:35:25 PM	Sen. Martin introduces himself
1:36:07 PM	Sen. Stewart
1:37:01 PM	Sen. Wright
1:38:06 PM	Leader Albritton
1:39:21 PM	Tab 1 - SB 76, State Park Campsite Reservations
1:39:46 PM	Sen. Hooper explains bill
1:40:49 PM	Chair asks if there are questions on bill
1:40:54 PM	Sen. Albritton is recognized for a question
1:41:32 PM	Response by Sen. Hooper
1:42:51 PM	Sen. Powell recognized for a question
1:43:08 PM	Response by Sen. Hooper
1:43:42 PM	Sen. Martin recognized for a question
1:44:23 PM	Response by Sen. Hooper
1:44:34 PM	Sen. Martin has follow-up comment
1:45:04 PM	No appearance forms
1:45:12 PM	Comment by Sen. Harrell
1:45:57 PM	Sen. Hooper waives close
1:46:03 PM	Roll call on SB 76
1:46:11 PM	SB 76 is reported favorably
1:46:24 PM	Tab 2 - SB 54, Land Acquisition Trust Fund, by Chair Rodriguez
1:46:36 PM	Vice Chair Harrell takes over as Chair
1:46:44 PM	Sen. Rodriguez explains bill
1:47:18 PM	Barcode 686410 is taken up
1:47:43 PM	No questions on amendment
1:47:53 PM	David Cullen from the Sierra Club testifies on amendment
1:48:17 PM	Mr. Cullen speaks against amendment
1:48:54 PM	Chair asks if there are any further appearance cards
1:49:02 PM	Chair asks if there's debate on amendment
1:49:08 PM	No debate
1:49:10 PM	Sen. Hooper waives close
1:49:14 PM	Amendment 686410 is adopted
1:49:18 PM	Back on bill as amended
1:49:24 PM	Sen. Stewart's recognized for question to the bill
1:49:36 PM	Sen. Rodriguez recognized to answer
1:49:53 PM	Vice Chair helps to answer question
1:50:18 PM	No further questions
1:50:34 PM	David Cullen waives in opposition to bill
1:50:49 PM	Lisa Tennyson for Monroe Co. speaks in favor of the bill
1:51:26 PM	Isabella Nicolas w/ the League of Women Voters, waives in support
1:51:43 PM	Sen. Stewart comments
1:52:09 PM	No further debate; Sen. Rodriguez closes on bill
1:52:36 PM	Roll call on CS/SB 54; reported favorably
1:52:58 PM	Chair yielded back to Sen. Rodriguez
1:53:08 PM	Tab 3 - Presentation by DEP on Seagrass Restoration
1:53:35 PM	Ms. Alex Reed, Dir. of DEP's Office of Resilience & Coastal Protection, is the presenter

2:02:06 PM No questions to Dir. Reed
2:02:18 PM Tab 4 - Presentation by Traci Deen, Carlton Ward Jr., & Mallory Demmitt
2:03:23 PM Presentation is on Fla. Wildlife Corridor by the Fla. Wildlife Corridor Fndn.
2:03:52 PM Carlton Ward, Jr., photographer with Nat'l Geographic, begins
2:07:34 PM Mr. Ward introduces Ms. Mallory Demmitt, CEO of Fla. Wildlife Corridor Fndn.
2:11:17 PM Ms. Demmitt turns podium over to Traci Deen, CEO of Conservation Fla.
2:14:45 PM Sen. Harrell is recognized for a question
2:15:16 PM Ms. Demmitt recognized to respond
2:15:39 PM Follow-up question by Sen. Harrell
2:15:47 PM Response by Ms. Demmitt
2:15:53 PM Leader Albritton is recognized for a question
2:16:50 PM Response by Mr. Ward
2:19:10 PM Follow-up by Sen. Albritton
2:20:15 PM Response by Ms. Deen
2:20:16 PM Ms. Demmitt adds to answer
2:20:42 PM Mr. Ward also responds
2:21:04 PM Question by Sen. Albritton
2:21:43 PM Response by Ms. Deen
2:22:27 PM Follow-up from Sen. Albritton
2:22:41 PM Response by Ms. Deen
2:22:56 PM Mr. Ward adds to response
2:23:25 PM Final question from Sen. Albritton
2:24:33 PM Response from Mr. Ward
2:25:07 PM Response addition from Ms. Demmitt
2:25:22 PM No other questions
2:25:54 PM Short film from Nat'l Geographic Society
2:27:58 PM There was a problem with the sound, so audience & committee directed to website
2:28:04 PM Chair asks if there's any other business before committee
2:28:16 PM Seeing none, Sen. Wright moves to adjourn